

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I thank my friend from Illinois. I commend the Senator for his substitute. What the Senator is talking about is exactly what the seniors of America are asking us to do to make sure they have a comprehensive prescription drug benefit under Medicare which they know will be there, which is stable, dependable, where you can choose your own doctor no matter where you live in the country; that whether you live in the upper peninsula of Michigan or Chicago, IL, you will have an opportunity to receive the health care you need and deserve under Medicare.

By simply expanding that to include prescription drugs, and then coupling that with the ability to keep prices down, I believe this is the best possible approach to come before the Senate—in fact, the U.S. Congress. I am hopeful that colleagues, when this comes to the floor, will rally around this plan.

What Senator DURBIN has done is put together a plan designed for seniors, not designed for pharmaceutical companies or insurance companies, which is, unfortunately, why this process has become so complicated. For example, people look at me with bewilderment when I am explaining that for the private sector plans in their region, if there are two or more, they would have to take one. But if there isn't, they could have a backup, but then they would have to drop it and go back to an insurance plan. When I explain that plan, they scratch their heads and say: Why are you doing that?

Well, unfortunately, we have a plan put forward—and I have to say it is a valiant effort by many people to try to come to some consensus, and I appreciate that—but the reality is, it is designed much more to benefit the pharmaceutical companies in particular than it is our seniors.

Why is our approach not supported by the pharmaceutical industry? For one simple reason: If we have all 40 million seniors and people with disabilities in one insurance plan, they can negotiate a big group discount, which is what they should be able to do. They should be able to come together, as one insurance plan, and negotiate a group discount. As Senator DURBIN indicated, when you do that, you are not paying retail. In fact, the Federal Government does that on behalf of our veterans through the VA, and we are able to get about a 40-percent discount, which is a terrific deal for the veterans of this country. I am proud we do that, but why shouldn't that same opportunity be available for every senior, for every person with a disability under Medicare?

So I just wanted to rise to congratulate the Senator's vision on putting forward the right plan that makes sure that, in fact, our seniors know they can count on a \$35 premium. They would also not have to have a deductible. Seventy percent, as I understand, of their prescription drug costs would be paid for. There would be no gap in coverage

for the last few months of the year. Or if you found yourself getting to a point where you reached the end of your coverage, and then, unfortunately, your doctor indicates you have an even more serious illness to deal with, you would not be left wondering what to do to pay for that treatment and medication.

This plan does what our seniors in this country are asking for. I believe it does what we should be doing for them. It is what they need, and it is what they deserve. It is what they have been waiting for.

I commend the Senator from Illinois for putting forward this option of which I encourage all of our colleagues to come together to embrace, standing together to achieve a bipartisan victory that is in the best interest of our American seniors.

#### TAX RELIEF, SIMPLIFICATION, AND EQUITY ACT OF 2003

Mr. SMITH. Mr. President, I ask the Chair to lay before the Senate a message from the House with respect to H.R. 1308; that the Senate disagree to the House amendments to the Senate amendments, agree to the request for a conference with the House on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses, and that the Chair be authorized to appoint conferees on the part of the Senate.

Mr. REID. Reserving the right to object, I believe this is on the Lincoln child tax credit legislation; is that true?

Mr. SMITH. I believe that is true.

Mr. REID. I am glad this is happening. I hope the message to the Republican leaders, at least from us, is that it will be a real conference and that they will work toward resolving this most important issue. I have no objection.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Presiding Officer said before the Senate the following message from the House of Representatives:

*Resolved*, That the House insist upon its amendments to the Senate amendments to the bill (H.R. 1308) entitled "An Act to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to end certain abusive tax practices, to provide tax relief and simplification, and for other purposes", and ask a conference with the Senate on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses thereon.

*Ordered*, That the following Members be the managers of the conference on the part of the House.

For consideration of the House amendments to the Senate amendments to the House bill, and modifications committed to conference: Mr. Thomas, Mr. DeLay, and Mr. Rangel.

The Presiding Officer (Mr. ALEXANDER) appointed Mr. GRASSLEY, Mr. NICKLES, Mr. LOTT, Mr. BAUCUS, and Mrs. LINCOLN conferees on the part of the Senate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from the great State of Nevada.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, the Senator from New Hampshire has been more than generous with his patience. I

would ask, however, unanimous consent that the time until 11 o'clock be for debate only on this matter. I have spoken to the majority, and they are in agreement with that. So I ask the time until 11 o'clock be for debate only on the bill.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. REID. Has the bill been reported this morning?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Chair will now make that statement.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, my consent deals with the Medicare bill.

#### CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

#### PRESCRIPTION DRUG AND MEDICARE IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 2003—Resumed

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the hour of 10 a.m. having arrived, the Senate will proceed to the consideration of S. 1, which the clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 1) to amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to make improvements in the medicare program, to provide prescription drug coverage under the medicare program, and for other purposes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CORNYN). The Senator from New Hampshire.

Mr. GREGG. Mr. President, I rise to talk about an issue which we, as the Senate, are going to address for the next 2 weeks, which is the question of how to put in place a drug benefit and to reform the Medicare system so that it is more viable.

This is, obviously, the most significant piece of legislation in the area of spending on which any of us in this Congress will vote. In fact, in my years in Congress, this is the most significant piece of spending legislation I have ever seen because it represents the most dramatic expansion, the greatest expansion of an entitlement in our history; therefore, it needs to be done right. In my opinion, there are issues which need to be addressed and which we need to discuss in order to accomplish that.

To understand the issue and to put it in context, you have to go back to the beginning of the problem. And the beginning of the problem, I hate to say it, was when I was born—1946, 1947 through 1955. It was that postwar period, where America was full of itself, and our people were returning from the war, and we repopulated our country with the largest baby boom in the history of our country. That baby boom meant an explosion of people in our country, people who have contributed, I hope—people think immensely—over those years and decades since that